

# **MEDIA RELATIONS GUIDE FOR PHA UK MEMBERS**

## Introduction

Welcome to this practical guide to media relations prepared especially for PHA UK members.

**Media Relations** is classically described as “a systematic process of informing, educating and persuading”. The ultimate objective of media relations is to achieve beneficial editorial coverage in the media.

Media coverage in the editorial sections of magazines, newspapers or within the programming of TV and radio (i.e. not advertising) is a very important way of communicating to others who may also be touched by pulmonary hypertension in some way. Because editorial content is created by independent journalists the resultant coverage has more credibility among an organisation's target audience as it is considered unbiased (in comparison to paid-for advertising).

Talking to the media can seem daunting, particularly if you are not used to it. The PHA UK media team are available to help you, so if you have any questions or have a story that you think may be of interest to the local or national media, please do not hesitate to contact us on 01709 761450 or via email at [media@phassociation.uk.com](mailto:media@phassociation.uk.com)

Within this document are some basic guidelines on the considerations you should make prior to approaching and dealing with the press. We have also included some general tips on writing a press release and pointers on the do's and don'ts of speaking to a journalist.

## **The Purpose Of Media Relations**

- Create awareness and interest in Pulmonary Hypertension (PH) and PHA UK amongst the general public
- Educate the public and healthcare professionals about PH, its treatment and specialist centres
- Increase the speed of diagnosis of PH
- Re-assure existing members about PHA UK's activities
- Increase membership of PHA UK

## **Media Considerations**

When approached and influenced correctly, the media can be a patient group's greatest ally. The media is always looking for interesting stories - and it is important to maximise an opportunity when it presents itself. There are numerous opportunities for editorial publicity with the media - news stories, articles, case studies/ testimonials, letters etc, etc. However, you need to be aware that the various publications and broadcast outlets receive a huge amount of information on a daily basis, so you will have to assess the value/strength of a story of what you wish to bring to the media's attention prior to approaching them.

You shouldn't bother the media with stories of no great importance. The appointment of a new treasurer to your patient support group might be big news for you, but isn't likely to be of huge interest to the media (unless it's a celebrity).

To interest local media, a story has to have local news value and ideally contain a local human interest element such as the testimony of a local case study whose story is relevant to the angle of the press release. The story should be backed up with easily substantiated facts and figures, which, where possible should be relevant to the locale, supported by a good quote from a PHA UK spokesperson.

**The PHA UK media team are available to aid you but there are some factors to consider which will help them to help you.**

**Firstly, timing.** The media requires sufficient notice of an event happening or a news story that's about to occur. Notifying the press of an event two to three weeks in advance of an event is about right, so ensure you are talking to the PHA UK media team at least one month ahead of the event. With a news story, national, local, and regional media need notification a week ahead of publication/broadcast to allow journalists enough time to gain background information and interview any relevant individuals or parties so that your story gets full consideration.

If you believe that you do have something important or interesting to say on a PH related issue then perhaps in the first instance consider writing a letter to the editor of your local newspaper for publication. Again the PHA UK media team can help, simply send us a copy of the letter you wish to send in advance, so that we might provide any advice to ensure your letter gains the editors full consideration and don't forget to let us have a copy of any resulting coverage

Included in the letter, you might wish to offer the editor the chance of receiving an article on PH. Articles are an important tool for setting out and establishing the support and information your patient group can provide, which is of particular interest to undiagnosed patients and referring GPs.

If the editor is interested and would take a pre-written article make sure you have an idea of appropriate "angles" and word counts and then get in touch with the PHA-UK media team.

The **Press Release** is one of the main tools of media relations. Because of this, every journalist receives hundreds of press releases a week. Those that do not capture interest quickly and do not convey news in a concise manner will get rejected very quickly.

A **Press Release** needs to be persuasive, but this does not mean it should use persuasive language in the way that sales literature or advertising do. A press release is persuasive because the news it contains is interesting and relevant to the ultimate readers/listeners or viewers of the publication or broadcast outlet. It is the news element and the local or national relevance of a press release that interests the journalist. Therefore, its important that you select your stories carefully as the more newsworthy they are, the more likely they are to receive coverage.

**Basic rules for writing press releases**

- **Let the media know the information provided has been written specifically for their needs.** Type in a large and bold font at the top of the page 'Press Information' or 'Press Release'
- **Gain attention – the headline must rouse interest.** Obviously, by its very nature, the headline cannot contain the whole story, but equally it must not be completely obscure.
- **Lay out your press release so that the information is easily readable.** Make it easy for journalists to edit the release by using wide margins and double line spacing.
- **Keep it simple and stick to the point** – a press release must not look like a publicity brochure. Make every word count. Use short simple sentences. Write for clarity rather than trying to impress the reader with your grasp of language.
- **Tell the whole story in the first paragraph.** One of the requirements of a press release is to get the journalist to read on. The first paragraph should tell the whole story - and be able to live as a story in its own right. Points to be covered are who, what, where, when, why and how. After the first paragraph, the release should expand upon the main points of the story, filling in the detail. Keep it logical and simple, using separate paragraphs to cover each of the major points, outlining features and benefits.
- **No unsubstantiated claims** - remember the journalist, not the source, is responsible. Any facts you include within the press release must be cross referenced and the source of the information included as a footnote (under a title of Editors Notes) to allow a journalist to double check the facts.
- **Don't use superlatives, hype, or unqualified comparatives.** Journalists are flooded with information from products and organisations all claiming to be "the biggest" and "the best". And virtually every company believes that its product is "the first" or represents "a breakthrough". The honest truth is that this kind of hype turns journalists off. The best option is simply to present the facts in the press release and let the journalist make their own judgements. This is less of an issue with a group like the PHA UK than with a product.
- **Use quotes** - particularly if they are from a third-party endorsing your story, for example, a medical expert or PHA UK spokesperson. Quotes bring a story alive and journalists will often use them when writing up a story. However, remember to check with the person you are quoting in advance.
- **Avoid jargon & technical language** - Journalists may be embarrassed at not knowing what certain medical terms or abbreviations mean. This means that they may decide not to cover your story or may misunderstand it, failing to recognise the most important facts. Sensible use of abbreviations is acceptable however ensure are spelt out in full the first time they appear.

## **Basic rules for writing press releases (continued)**

- **Provide easy access to more information.** At the end of the release, include details of an individual who can provide further information to the journalist. Details needed are name, job title, telephone and fax numbers, and an email address if one exists. You should always ensure that the person listed as the contact is aware they may be contacted by the media. You should always ensure that the listed contact is fully aware of the story in advance of distributing the press release. It is highly embarrassing for a journalist to call someone listed as a contact on a press release to discover that a) they do not know anything about the subject, b) they were not aware they had been listed as a press contact and will not speak to the press without approval from their manager or c) that they are out of the office or on holiday and no-one knows how to contact them. Not only is this frustrating for the journalist, but it could mean your story does not get the coverage it deserves.

- **A final check:**

- Who?
- What?
- Why?
- When?
- Where?
- How?

### **The top ten press release errors**

- Too long
- Who, what, why, when, where and how not covered
- Too verbose, rambling, not to the point
- Inappropriate
- Out of date
- Presentation is too promotional
- The story is buried
- Too clever by half!
- Difficult to follow-up
- Just plain boring

**Remember if in doubt give the PHA UK media team a shout!!**

### **Background Information:**

Attached to the press release should be a document titled 'Background Information' outlining core facts about PH and PHA UK (This information can be cut and paste from the PHA UK website, under the 'frequently asked questions' section of the media centre page)

### **Case Studies**

Acting as a case study involves telling your own story. It also presents the opportunity to talk about PHA UK and demonstrate the benefits that it can offer. At the same time this will serve to raise the level of awareness of the condition, and treatments that exist, to those who may not be aware of the condition at all or who have received the wrong information and are unaware of the treatment options available.

### **Case Studies (continued)**

At the foot of your press release highlight the name and location of the case study available to be interviewed/featured and if possible a contact telephone number.

On a separate page provide the journalist with a couple of paragraphs outlining basic facts about yourself, your full name, age, location, marital status and a précis of your story including quotes of what you'd like to get across. Some publications will happily take a case study written by you, other media organisations will want to send their own journalist to visit the individual and write the story themselves

### **Photographs**

Photography is the easiest thing to do badly but a good photo can make the front page with a low-key story. The picture should always tell the story. Don't be afraid of taking the picture yourself but remember to set up the shot by being organised. An element of surprise or unusual pictures can add interest and they usually need people or children with frowns or smiles. Pictures are very immediate however so you will need to get print them and get them to the paper usually the same day. When you send prints label the backs clearly including names, dates and contact number. Make sure you check the best format for the picture with the publication usually an electronic jpeg or a transparency is favored.

If you are not comfortable taking pictures yourself you can always arrange to have a local freelance photographer take the shot who you can normally get in contact with via your local paper.

### **Photographers/Camera crew**

If you have an interesting story that you think is really worth filming or photographing sell the story to the media so that the press come to you. You will need to arrange a time, place and the people that you want to have present. Depending on the size of the event bring people to help with the organisation and always brief the photographers. Preparing a background "photocall" document for the day to circulate to the press beforehand this should include the key newsworthy points, dates, times location maps and what/who is available to film, photograph or interview. (make sure they receive the "photocall" document well in advance of the event and phone through the day before to check if they are attending. Don't ever be afraid to offer your ideas for a different angle, remember you know your story best.

When TV cameras come to you try to agree a brief first if possible. This will allow you to have some control over what can be filmed and if necessary gain permission in advance. Always accompany TV crews at all times and be careful what you and others say. It could all be broadcast. If you are using a spokesperson it is always worth checking if that person has had any experience or even better some media training. In the least make sure they are briefed with your key messages. (The PHA UK media team can help you identify your key messages)

## **Contacts**

Build up contacts with individual journalists. You are more likely to get positive coverage if the journalist knows who you and the company are. If you have given a journalist a good story in the past, they are more receptive to ideas in the future. You have already proved you will not waste their time, but are someone who understands the way they work and what they are interested in.

## **Press interviews & handling the media**

Interviews are probably the best tool for getting your message across. The face-to-face press interview allows you to comprehensively tell a journalist about your story. Not only is this likely to result in immediate coverage, but you are building a relationship with a journalist. If the journalist finds you provided them with useful, interesting information, they are more likely to contact you again in the future when looking for comment on a particular issue.

**Do not be afraid of speaking to the press.** Journalists are human! They are just doing a job that is often quite time-pressured and busy. Just be patient and polite!

**Be prepared.** If you are telephoning the media, make sure you know what you are going to say and ensure you are prepared to answer any possible questions. Always have dates, times, venues and logistical arrangements available if you are arranging a meeting.

**Return calls from the press as soon as possible.** By waiting for even a day, you may find the opportunity has gone. A journalist writing a story has a deadline to meet and they may not be able to wait to talk to you, even if you have something of immense interest to say.

**Keep brief and to the point in your delivery** - think exchange of information not entertaining monologue.

**Do sometimes expect to receive awkward questions from the press.** Don't be negative or hostile; they are only doing their job. Be prepared to answer the questions - but do not lie.

**"No comment". Do not use this.** It sounds as if you are trying to hide something. If you do not know the answer to a question, then say you will find out and let them know. If someone else is better able to comment, then let the journalist know and arrange for them to speak to this person. Occasionally, there will be times when you are really not able to comment – perhaps because the journalist is asking for sensitive information. If this is the case, then

explain that you are not able to say anything and explain why. Do not let yourself be forced into commenting - remember, you are perfectly entitled not to answer a question.

**'Off the record'** One basic rule to remember is: There is no such thing as on or off the record. If you don't want to see something that you say in print or broadcast then don't say it to a journalist.

**Do not talk futures.** It is very easy to make predictions that go wrong (for whatever reason).

**Follow the patient group line.** Even though you may have personal views on an issue. Bear in mind that you are speaking on behalf of the PHA UK. Speak to PHA UK media team in advance so you are doubly clear on the charity's position

**Be honest.** Don't be tempted to lie; the chances are that you will be caught out at some stage. Once you have been caught lying, then you will lose all credibility with the press.

### **Media interview technique tips**

- At the interview remember your time will often be very limited - particularly on radio / TV so:
  - Get on with your message as soon as possible
  - Be POSITIVE in attitude, posture and language
  - If it is a press interview take your time before you answer. Don't rush in with illconceived thoughts.
  - Stick to your message - don't waste time digressing
  - Jump on untruths - interrupting if necessary
  - Apply the rules of good verbal communication:
    - Keep it simple and jargon free
    - Make it personal - address the interviewer as 'you'
  - Make it memorable by being descriptive - use analogies
  - Make it believable with examples